Forest Health Alert

Sudden Oak Death

(Phytophthora ramorum)

USDA Forest Service

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Sudden oak death (SOD), also known as ramorum blight, is a disease caused by the fungus-like organism *Phytophthora ramorum*. Currently found in parts of California and Oregon, the pathogen could infect red oaks in the eastern United States. Infected trees develop cankers that can eventually kill them.

Delaware's native forest cover is an oak-hickory mix. The introduction of *Phytophthora ramorum* could have serious consequences. Currently, areas of California and Oregon are experiencing significant mortality in tanoak and other trees infected by this pathogen. In recent years, infected plant materials from California and Oregon have been mistakenly shipped to nurseries in the eastern United States. Before the problem was discovered, some of these plants were sold to homeowners for landscaping. Not all of the plants that were sold have been located.

Infected trees exhibit oozing cankers on the trunk. However, many other things also cause cankers that look identical to those caused by *Phytophthora ramorum*. The only way to positively identify the pathogen is through laboratory analysis of canker samples. Certain plants in the understory could also help to spread the disease. These plants, such as viburnums and honeysuckle, would not develop stem cankers. Instead, they would experience twig dieback and would exhibit brown lesions on the leaves. Again, these symptoms can be caused by other factors, so laboratory analysis of symptomatic tissues would be necessary.

State authorities have developed vigilant detection surveys to search for SOD in Delaware. Since 2004, the Delaware Forest Service has surveyed for the pathogen that causes SOD using techniques developed by the U.S. Forest Service. To date, *Phytophthora ramorum* has not been found in Delaware.

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